

Frontloading Meaning

Pre-Reading Strategies

Dear George,

I'm quite sure that I introduced the short stories and novels we read that year in class by telling you all something about the author or something about the plot. Perhaps, for a little variation, I sometimes introduced some vocabulary words. I didn't understand how important it was for you to be thinking about the selection before you began reading the selection. Tapping into prior knowledge meant seeing if you had read another story by that same author. I was the only one doing something before we began reading—and I wonder why I was confused that you all were sometimes so passive. Reading is an active process and that activity starts long before you turn to the first page of the book.

Activating Prior Knowledge

Several years ago, while speaking at the Texas Council of Teachers of English Annual Convention, I asked the 300+ teachers in my session to answer this question: "What do you do prior to reading to connect your students with that text?" As teachers filed out the room at the end of our session, they left their answers on a table. Later, as I read through the 238 responses, I saw that most teachers were introducing stories just like I had introduced them for so very long—by telling students something about the text.

While this practice could certainly be labeled as providing necessary background knowledge, I'm not sure it's the best way to help students become actively engaged with a text. Dependent readers are dependent in

How did these teachers introduce a new text? Sixty-eight percent said they tell students a little about the author, plot, and setting; 19 percent said they discuss vocabulary words; 8 percent said they introduce a story by asking students questions about topics or themes they will read about in the selection; 5 percent said they sometimes dress up as a character or bring in props such as clothing or food or photographs that help students understand the era or location.

Dependent readers are dependent in part because of their passive reading.

part because of their passive reading. The challenge we face is to get them thinking about the selection and about how they will read the selection before they begin the text.

In this chapter, you'll find several approaches that help students engage with texts prior to reading. Each strategy helps students

- ◆ access their prior knowledge
- ◆ interact with portions of the text prior to reading
- ◆ practice sequencing, find cause and effect relationships, draw comparisons, make inferences, and predict
- ◆ identify vocabulary that might be a problem
- ◆ construct meaning before they begin reading the text

Anticipation Guides

Little kids do it. They ask constantly what's going on and where they are being taken. Big kids do it. They ask repeatedly what the doctor is going to do before the doctor does it, and they plan what they'll say when they are approaching parents with special requests. Adults do it. We pick up travel brochures before we travel, study maps before we make a car trip, and consult the checkbook before we make a purchase. We all do it—we try to anticipate what's going to happen before it actually happens.

Skilled readers consciously try to anticipate what the text is about before they begin reading. They look at the cover, art, title, genre, author, headings, graphs, charts, length, print size, front flaps, and back covers. I've even seen kids reading the bibliographic information on the copyright page. They ask friends, "Is this any good?" They do anything to find out something before they begin reading. Dependent readers, on the other hand, often don't do that; they are told to read something, and once the text is in hand, they just begin. They often skip titles and background information, hardly ever read book jackets, and rarely look through the text for clues. The assignment is to read, so they'll read—maybe.

But they'd read better if they would bring to reading what they bring to the rest of life: that need to anticipate. To help these students learn to do that, use Anticipation Guides (Tierney, Readence, and Dishner, 1995). An Anticipation Guide is a set of generalizations related to the theme of a selection. Students decide whether they agree or disagree with each statement in the guide. These guides activate students' prior knowledge, encourage them

to make a personal connection to what they will be reading, and give them a chance to become an active participant with the text before they begin reading.

Step Inside a Classroom

"This is hard," one student from the back row complained as he looked up from the paper he was working on.

"Yeah," another said.

The teacher just smiled and nodded. "Hmm," he responded.

"Aw, come on, Mr. Davidson. These questions are really hard," the student said again.

Another student in the middle of the room looked up and said, "Not really hard like 'What's the answer?' but hard like it's tough to make a choice."

"Hmm," Mr. Davidson said again, smiling.

The students kept reading, kept completing the worksheet, occasionally looked up, and said things like, "Impossible," or "This is tough," or "Well, it depends," but kept working.

As they finished, Mr. Davidson finally spoke: "So, do you want to talk about them [the questions on the worksheet] now or later?"

"Now," eighteen voices replied.

"Okay. Let's just get a count of how many agreed and how many disagreed and then we'll come back and discuss. How many of you agreed with number 1: 'If you are going to be a good citizen, then you should always do what your government expects.'" Some hands went up, others stayed down.

"It's that word *always*, Mr. Davidson. What if bad people start running the government?" a student said.

Mr. Davidson said, "Hmm." They all laughed. Then the teacher started a chart of agree/disagree responses on the board. "Number 2: 'Hiding people that the government says are criminals is wrong.'" More hands up, still some hands down. "All right. Number 3: 'If you have limited food and limited space and are trying hard to make sure your family survives, you shouldn't be expected to take in other people who will make your supplies disappear even faster.'"

Before hands could go up, a student spoke up. "That one was really hard, Mr. Davidson. I mean, you know that you should take in people that need help, but if you are trying to help your own family to survive, then you could like really hurt them if you say yes, but if you say no then you are one cold dude."

"Yeah," came a chorus of supporters.

"Hmm," Mr. Davidson said.

"Aw, come on," several said, smiling.

"Aren't you going to help us at all?" one asked.

"No," Mr. Davidson said, shaking his head.

"So we just have to decide?" another said.

"Yes," Mr. Davidson said. "Now, how many agree?" Hands went up.

"Number 4 says," he said after counting. "People who do cruel things can still be good people." More moans, but students finally raised hands showing if they agreed or disagreed.

After getting a sense of what the class thought about each statement, Mr. Davidson then returned to each point and began a discussion. Several students made comments about the last item, "People who do cruel things can still be good people."

MR. DAVIDSON: So, what do you think?

ALBERT: I think that's wrong. How could you be good and cruel at the same time?

KII: Well, what if you didn't want to be cruel but had to do a bad thing to survive? Like my uncle when he was leaving Vietnam. He had to steal some things because the government wasn't letting any more people out, and they weren't even supposed to leave. My cousin, he got into a fight and hurt another guy real bad, he thinks, but my cousin had to or the guy would have told what they were doing. My cousin and my uncle are not bad people.

ISAAC: Well, maybe sometimes you got to do what you do. But when people are just doin' stuff, that's wrong.

DEE: I think sometimes if you're bad, you're bad. That's it. But sometimes you're bad 'cause that's the way society makes you. You're tryin' to do right, but you have to join with a crew just to survive. Bein' in a crew, sometimes you do cold stuff.

ISAAC: Yeah, you do what you got to do.

MR. DAVIDSON: Okay, interesting thoughts, guys. You think you guys are the first group to ever have to face making choices about what you will do or won't do? You think you are the first group to wonder how far you'll go to protect yourself or those you love? It's happened throughout time to all sorts of people. One group of people has often tried to control another group. Now we are going to read a play about one girl's attempt to survive against a group that doesn't want her to survive. As you read the play, find the parts that address the issues we've been talking about. Go ahead and jot down page numbers on your Anticipation Guide. You'll find parts of

the play that make you think more about each of those statements. After you have finished reading, look at those parts again and think about your statements. If something you've read has changed whether or not you agree with the statement, make a note and then we'll talk about what you are thinking. Now this play is going to take several days to read. . . .

Debriefing the Strategy

These students were working through an Anticipation Guide for *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Mr. Davidson had purposely created statements that were "tough" to answer, as one student pointed out. The goal of the discussion wasn't to change students' minds, but to continue the process of bringing issues to their awareness.

Anticipation Guides first act as a prereading strategy and encourage students to connect to ideas and make predictions. Then, they allow students to look for cause and effect relationships as they read. Finally, they allow students to generalize, to discuss those generalizations, and to explore their own responses to a text.

Through the Anticipation Guide, these students had not only started thinking about issues they'd encounter in the play, they had also already explored their own thoughts about those issues. They were anticipating what they might find and were ready to meet those discoveries.

Putting the Strategy to Work

1. *First, write the Anticipation Guide.* I've found that if I look for the big ideas or themes that are presented as I read the text, I've got a start on what will make a good item to include in the guide. If one of the issues in the text is survival, then I begin jotting down generalizations about survival, keeping the most controversial ones. You don't need a lot of items; two items that encourage discussion are better than ten items that inspire little debate. Students should mark each statement as one with which they agree or disagree rather than as true or false. You don't want students considering the truth of the statement; instead, you want them exploring what they believe about the statement. Make sure you understand that there isn't a right or wrong answer; otherwise, you'll write ineffective guides like the following one, used by a history teacher to introduce a unit on the Holocaust:

1. It is wrong to persecute people because of their religious beliefs.
2. Hitler should not have ordered the extermination of the Jews.

Anticipation Guide

Directions: Read each statement and write Yes in the blank if you believe the statement and could support it or put No in the blank if you do not believe the statement and could not support it. After you finish reading the selection, revisit the statements. This time, decide how a character in the story would react to each statement.

Before Reading

After Reading

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| _____ 1. Mean people eventually get what they deserve. | _____ |
| _____ 2. Good deeds are always rewarded. | _____ |
| _____ 3. People see what they want to see. | _____ |
| _____ 4. Ignorance is bliss. | _____ |
| _____ 5. Marriage should be based on love. | _____ |
| _____ 6. Children should be obedient to their parents even if it means having to do something they don't want to do. | _____ |
| _____ 7. If a sibling is continually mean to another sibling, the hurt sibling should tell the parents even if that means hurting the parents. | _____ |
| _____ 8. Political leaders should prove their worthiness to lead rather than inherit the leadership position due to family history. | _____ |

FIGURE 6.1 *Sample Anticipation Guide for Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters*

3. Keeping a diary is a good way to record your feelings.
4. We should study the Holocaust to understand our past mistakes.

Every student marked "agree" for each item, since each statement had an obvious conclusion. The guide was not meaningful to students

Effective Anticipation Guides present students with pertinent issues that are worth discussing but that don't have clear-cut answers.

because it did not build anticipation. Effective Anticipation Guides present students with pertinent issues that are worth discussing but that don't have clear-cut answers. Figure 6.1 offers an example of an effective Anticipation Guide for the picture storybook *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters*, an African Cinderella tale retold and illustrated by John Steptoe. I've used this guide with students in eighth, ninth, and tenth grades. To use it with sixth or seventh graders, you might want to omit a few of the items.

2. *Next, introduce the strategy to students.* I've found that the best way to teach students how to use an Anticipation Guide is simply to do one with them. Make sure students understand that they aren't guessing the correct answer but are exploring their thoughts. I usually make one for the fairy tale "Cinderella." In the past I've included statements such as the following:

1. Sometimes life hands you cruel situations; when that happens, the best thing to do is just get through the situation. You'll eventually get a reward.
2. You should always be willing to turn the other cheek; in other words, if someone treats you poorly, you shouldn't fight back, but just keep on doing what you know is right.

These two brief statements elicit a discussion that encourages students to anticipate what they will read, to find how these statements play themselves out in the text, and to return to the statements after reading, ready to have some more wonderful discussions.

3. *Use Anticipation Guides before, during, and after reading.* Before reading, students should complete an Anticipation Guide that addresses issues in the selection. After students have completed the Anticipation Guide and you've talked about their responses, tell students to keep the guide close as they read so they can make notes about issues as they are revealed in the text. After students have finished reading, have them look at their original responses to see if they feel the same or see some detours in their thinking. The reading may have changed their responses by strengthening their original position or by making them doubt that position. Also, after reading, students revisit the guide to see how a particular character would have responded to the statements. This level of analysis encourages students to read critically, understanding issues from a character's point of view.

Questions and Answers

1. *Can an Anticipation Guide be used as a pre- and post-test?*
I've seen teachers try to use it as that, but I don't find it to be very effective. Instead, the more effective way of using it is either as a before-, during-, and after-reading strategy or as a brainstorming activity for writing.
2. *Should you use an Anticipation Guide if the text is about a topic that is unfamiliar to students?*

That's exactly when you need to use one. Remember, a major reason for using an Anticipation Guide is to activate students' prior knowledge. If students are about to read something that is outside their experience (say, reading Shakespeare for the first time), then we must form some bridges between their experiences and the text; otherwise, the reading will be for naught. That's why Anticipation Guides aren't based on facts but on generalizations you can draw from the text.

3. *Should the class always discuss their responses to the Anticipation Guide before reading the text?*

Not necessarily. I've told students to read the guide, answer it, read the text, find things in the text that relate to what's in the guide, and then revisit the guide after reading, marking whether or not they still agree. At other times, I've simply had students discuss their responses, as Mr. Davidson did. Do what works for that particular piece. However, my experience with dependent readers tells me that delayed gratification isn't a strong character trait. Keeping the guide short and allowing them to discuss their responses prior to reading the text is important.

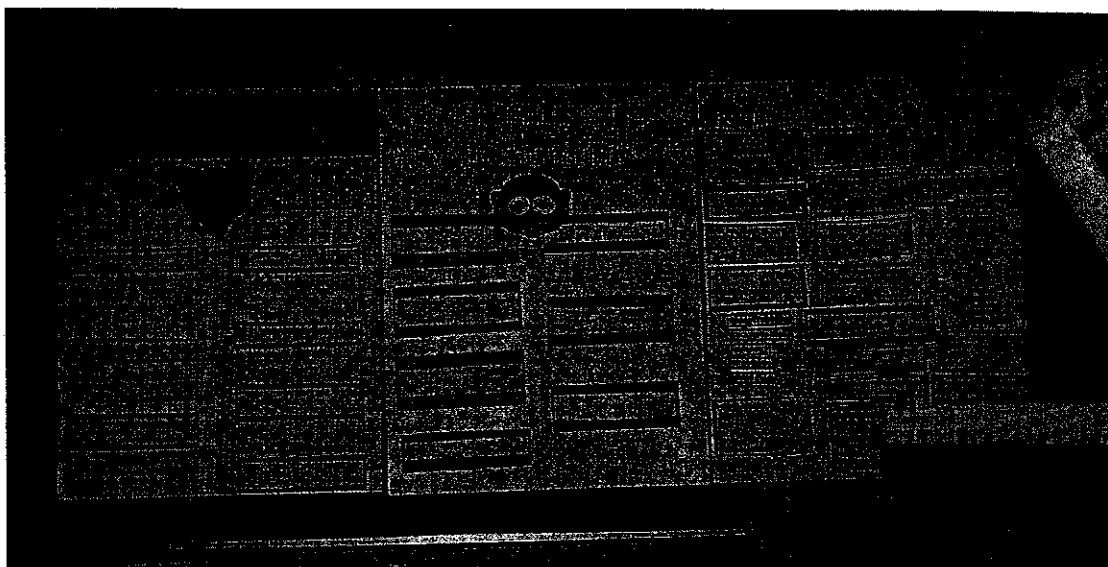
K-W-L

What I Know, What I Want to Learn, What I Learned (Ogle, 1986) provides a framework that helps readers access their knowledge about a topic before they read, consider what they want to learn, and then record what they have learned once they finish reading. Though this strategy was originally designed to help students with expository texts, I find that with some minor adjustments, students can use this to help them with narrative fiction.

Step Inside a Classroom

In this transcript, you are going to see a novice language arts teacher working with a class of sixth graders. They are about to start a three-week cross-curricular unit. With the topic of "Oceans," there's something for students to do in science, social studies, and language arts class. These twenty-seven students all read between the thirty-fifth and forty-second percentiles on the reading comprehension portion of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. Four are repeating sixth grade. The teacher (identified as T) begins the lesson and then turns it over to me.

T: Okay, let's begin to think about what we know about oceans. [She stands near a wall with a large sheet of chart paper on it. At the left end, near



A fifth-grade class's K-W-L chart on rain forests

the top, she has written the words "What We Know." Students begin offering ideas. I write down most of their comments.]

S1: There's the Galveston Ocean. It's near here.

S2: That's not an ocean. That's like, like a river to the ocean.

S3: It's the Gulf.

S1: So what's a gulf? Like a bird?

S3: No, you know, like a gulf. It's called, what's it called? [He looks at the teacher.]

T: I think you mean the Gulf of Mexico.

S4: Oh yeah, I've heard of that. It's like, like the part that goes into the ocean.

T: Okay, so one thing we know is the word *gulf*. [She writes the word *gulf* under the What We Know column.]

S5: And it's, there is four of them.

T: Four gulfs?

S5: No four oceans.

T: Okay. Can someone name them? [After several attempts by several people, they get them all listed.]

S6: And there's like pirates. You know there still are pirates. Really. They are like by Mexico. You have to be real careful.

S7: And fish. The ocean is filled with fish.

S8: Don't forget whales and dolphins.

S9: We saw this show, it was about how whales migrate. You know like birds?

S10: Oh, yeah, how they swim with the tides. So, put that, Miss, put tides and waves. There are waves.

S7: And there are other things too, you know like plants and seashells. Not just fish.

S11: And it's salty. You know, the ocean water, it's salty so you can't drink it.

Responses continued for another ten minutes or so. When students seemed finished, they reviewed all they had said. The teacher then took the chart paper down and told them they would look at it again the next day. The next day, they studied their responses as the teacher asked them to group items so that similar ideas were together. Then they came up with headings for their groupings. These groupings and headings were copied onto another sheet of chart paper so they could see all the areas. Then the teacher asked them the following question:

T: So, we've got everything really organized now. Now, let's make a second column and make a list of everything we want to know. Okay. What all else do you want to know? [Silence.] Keep thinking about oceans and tell me what else you want to know? [Silence.] Come on, who wants to know something about oceans?

S5: But Miss, we already told you everything we know. What else are we supposed to know?

This nonresponsive conversation continued for a few moments. Finally the teacher walked over to me and said, "This is why I hate K-W-L. They never have anything to say. It's like they've told you everything they know, so now what?" She was clearly upset. I told her that I often had the same trouble until I learned how to link their comments about what they already knew to questions about what they wanted to know. "Show me," she said, handing me the marker. So I began.

ME: Okay guys. It's my turn now. Remember me, Dr. Beers? I need some practice working on a K-W-L chart. That's what you guys are creating right now. This is a chart that shows what you know, what you want to learn, and what you have learned. You've already done the first column. Let's see what we can get in the second column. [Silence.] Let's look at this first category, life in the ocean. Somebody said there were lots of fish in the ocean. I wonder what we want to know about these fish? [Silence.] You know, I've always wondered about what makes some fish saltwater fish and others what they call a freshwater fish. [I write that on the chart directly across from the word *fish*.]

S3: Yeah, I heard my uncle say that he went freshwater fishing, and I didn't know what that was.

S5: And there are bass and trout, but are they fresh- or saltwater fish?

S6: Yeah, and what about those fish that lay down flat and they have an eye on just one side. I always wanted to know what they are.

S7: Yeah we saw one of those at an aquarium. And that makes me think, you know, do fish blink their eyes? You know? And if they don't, then do they go to sleep?

ME: These are great questions. What questions do you have about the other things in this category? (Figure 6.2 shows you a sampling of their categories and some of their related questions.)

We moved through each category. I repeatedly asked them to connect their questions to the topic. Some students had questions in some categories but not in others. Generally, one question would encourage others. I thought the most interesting question came from the Characteristics About the Ocean category.

ME: Okay. What questions do you have about the topics in this area? As you think about the temperature or the waves or the tides or the salt or how much space it takes up, what questions do you have?

S12: Miss, I have a question.

ME: Okay.

S12: For the salty part, I was wondering how come the salt in the ocean burns your eyes but the salt in your tears doesn't?

S13: Oh that's such a great question. We went to the ocean and went swimming and man, the water it just burned my eyes but like if you cry, like when you were little, then your tears they don't burn but that's got salt too. That is like such a good question.

The students continued generating questions for each category through the next day. At one point, because I knew what students would be reading in their language arts class, I asked how the oceans got their names. That led to a student asking, "Are these the same names that people anyplace would have for oceans or are these just the American names?"

Debriefing the Strategy

This teacher was using a K-W-L chart because she had read about them in her undergraduate content area reading class; however, every time she created one with students, she admitted, she was the one who generated the questions for the second column, as students had little to offer. The problem was

What We Know	What We Want to Know
<u>Life in the Ocean</u>	
Fish	What makes some fish saltwater fish and others fresh-water fish? What kind of water do bass and trout live in? What's the name of the flat fish that just has one eye on the side of his head? Do fish have eyelids? How do fish sleep?
Sharks	What are the man-eating sharks? Could there ever really be a shark like Jaws?
Whales	Why is it called a blue whale? Why do whales live in the ocean but have to breathe air?
<u>Names of the Ocean</u>	
Atlantic	Are these the same names that people anyplace would have for oceans or are these just the American names? How did they get their names? How do you know where one begins and the other ends?
Pacific	
Indian	
Arctic	
<u>Characteristics About the Ocean</u>	
Some is cold and some is warm	What makes it different temperatures? Do different fish live in different oceans because of the temperature?
Has low tides and high tides	Where does the water go during low tide? Is it causing a flood someplace else?
It is salty	What makes it salty? Is it the same kind of salt that's in your salt shaker? How come the salt in the ocean burns your eyes but the salt in your tears doesn't?
<u>Exciting Things About Oceans</u>	
Pirates	Who were some pirates?
Sunken ships	What are some sunken ships other than the Titanic? If you find one, can you keep the treasure?
<u>Problems for the Oceans</u>	
Pollution	What is the pollution doing to the sea life?
Oil spills	Why do they spill oil on the ocean? How do people clean it up?
The pollution is killing the fish	Have any fish gone extinct from the pollution?

FIGURE 6.2 K-W-L grouping of terms

What We Know	What We Want to Know
Types of Boats on the Ocean	
Ships	What's the biggest ship ever built? What makes something a ship and not a boat?
Canoes	Why did Indians make canoes instead of sailboats? What did they make canoes out of?
Words Connected to Oceans	
gulf	Is the Gulf of Mexico the only gulf?

FIGURE 6.2 *continued*

that this teacher saw the chart as three distinct columns to be completed. She had forgotten that the purpose of the chart was to link what the kids knew to what they wanted to know. That's what comprehension really is: linking the unknown to the known. Once I showed her how to constantly tie the questions to the information students had already generated, she began to see how powerful this strategy could be.

Putting the Strategy to Work

1. *First, decide what topic you want discussed on the K-W-L chart.* This is primarily used with nonfiction informational texts where deciding the topic is easy; if you are using this with fiction, you'll need to think about the theme or topic in the novel or story and see how that would lend itself to a discussion prior to reading.
2. *Next, decide how you'll record that information*—on chart paper, a transparency, or a computer.
3. *Then, ask students what they know about that topic.* Be aware, sometimes they know nothing. Once I asked a seventh-grade science class what they knew about photosynthesis. Not much. Generating questions was difficult because they didn't know enough to ask questions beyond, "What is it and how does it work?"
4. *Make sure that, after completing the K column, students have a chance to group responses and label those groups.* This alone is a wonderful exercise in comparing and contrasting.

5. Finally, remember that when you move from the K column to the W column, the point is to connect what they wonder about to what they've already told you. Linking the unknown to the known is critical.

Questions and Answers

1. How do I use this for fiction?

Think about the topic or theme of the book students will be reading. For instance, before we read *To Kill a Mockingbird* in a ninth-grade class, we began a K-W-L chart on the topic of discrimination in the United States. Not only had I decided on the topic that would guide our K-W-L discussion, but I had made a list of some of the topics or questions I hoped students would offer. With this list in mind, I listened for certain responses from students as we worked through the K column. If these responses didn't emerge, I offered them myself. For instance, at one point I said, "I know that not only were the laws for black people and white people different for a long time in this country, but black people often didn't receive fair trials." Then when we moved to the W column, students asked, "Could black people serve on juries? Could they be judges or lawyers? Did some white lawyers not want to represent black people? How could it be a jury of your peers if no one on the jury was black?" Be careful with your topics, however. I tried this once in a sixth-grade class prior to reading *Summer of the Swans*. Students brainstormed what they knew about sibling rivalry (a lot). But then, when it came time to generate questions about the topics they had mentioned, there wasn't much discussion. They knew so much about this topic that they didn't question what caused it or what could be done to stop it.

2. What do we do after we've completed the first two columns?

Many teachers, at this point, move to reading the material or teaching the content. If that's the case, the K-W-L is a great way to access students' prior knowledge, help them organize their information, generate questions about that knowledge, and then read to answer those questions. However, if you want to use K-W-L in a slightly different fashion, insert another column between the W and the L columns labeled G for "Where do I need to Go to answer these questions?" Now, you've made this into a research plan. That's what we did with the sixth graders studying the ocean. The group interested in the salt in the ocean decided they needed to ask the school nurse about why the salt in your tears doesn't

burn your eyes but the salt in the ocean does. She referred them to a pediatric ophthalmologist who happily answered their questions during a phone conference. For this G column, avoid the quick reply of "library"—that's much too broad. Encourage primary sources. You'll have already scouted the phone book and thought through local resources so you'll have some ideas about places students might turn to get answers you've anticipated. Talk with your librarian to see what specific sources you might recommend if a trip to the library is the best answer.

3. *What's the L column for?*

That's a great place for students to record information that other students or small groups share with the class as a result of their research. You can also use this as a review column. Once you finish the unit, chapter, or novel, revisit the information you recorded on the K and W columns and ask students if they now can answer the questions they generated. Oftentimes they can't, but instead have gained new knowledge that now leads to more questions.

Probable Passage

Dependent readers often struggle because they don't predict what the selection might be about, don't think about what they already know about a topic, and don't form images as they read. These students simply open a book, look at words, and begin turning pages. Probable Passage (Wood, 1984) helps stop those passive reading habits by encouraging students to make predictions, to activate their prior knowledge about a topic, to see causal relationships, to make inferences, and to form images about a text.

As originally developed, Probable Passage is a brief summary of a text from which key words have been omitted. The teacher chooses these key words and presents them to the students. After discussing what the words mean, students arrange them in categories according to their probable functions in the story (such as setting, characters, conflicts, solutions, or endings), then use them to fill in the blanks of the Probable Passage. As students work through this process, they use what they know about story structure, think about vocabulary, look for causal relationships, and predict what they think will happen. I've adapted this process so that students now complete a Probable Passage worksheet. Students place words into boxes that are labeled "Characters," "Setting," "Problem," and "Outcomes" and then, from the

placement of those words, write a prediction statement that offers the gist of what this selection might be about.

Step Inside a Classroom

Mr. Robin put the following words on a transparency on the overhead projector: *guilt, bird, seashore, frostflower, jagged ivory bones, plover, boy, gun, quicksilver, sins, headlands*. He then distributed the Probable Passage worksheet (see Figure 6.3, reproducible image on page 323).

Mr. Robin chose those words after reading *Forgive My Guilt*, by Robert Tristram Coffin. He looked for words that gave insight into the characters, setting, conflict, and resolution. He also chose some words he thought students would not know.

Title of Selection _____		
Characters	Setting	Problem
<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
Gist Statement ... _____ _____ _____ _____		
Outcomes	Unknown Words	To discover ... 1. 2. 3.
<div></div>	<div></div>	

FIGURE 6.3 *Probable Passage*

"Okay guys, get into groups of three and begin putting the words into the correct boxes. Who remembers what you can put into the Unknown Words box?"

"Only words that you don't know what they mean," one voice responded.

"That's right. You can't put a word there just because you can't decide where it goes," he explained. "And how many times can you put a word in a box?"

Another student replied, "Only once. Once you've put it into one box, you can't put it anywhere else."

"Good. Now get started. Once your group gets words into the boxes, then you can write your gist statement." (See Figure 6.4 on page 90 for a completed Probable Passage worksheet.)

The students in the room began discussing where they would put certain words.

Group 1

S1: Let's put *gun* under Problem. Because, you know, if you have a gun, then that could be a problem.

S2: Yeah, but it could be the solution, too. You know, like you don't feel safe so you get a gun.

S3: Yeah, but I think it's more like the problem. Having the gun is the problem and then whatever you did with it, that causes you to be guilty. So put *guilt* under Outcomes.

Group 2

S1: Anybody know what a plover is?

S2: Like a plumber? Plover. Plumber. They kind of sound alike.

S1: I don't think so. It's just the *pl* that sound alike. And anyway, read these words. There's nothing else like sink or anything that would make you think of plumber.

S3: Put it in Unknown Words.

Group 3

S1: So, like, what is *boy*? He could be the problem. Like he got the gun and then did something.

S2: Yeah, but if he's the one that got the gun, then he's the character. You know, like he's the one who did it.

S3: Put him in both.

S2: You can't, man, you gotta choose.

Title of Selection _____

Characters	Setting	Problem
boy birds	sea	gun sin

Gist Statement.....

A boy goes to ~~the sea~~ and is going hunting but some birds fly up and they scare him so he shoots and someone else is there and he throws his jagged ivory bones into the sea and feels guilty.

Outcomes	Unknown Words	To discover.....
guilt jagged ivory bones	plover frost flower quicksilver	Why did the boy have a gun? 2. Whose bones? 3. What is a plover? 4. Did the boy do the shooting or get shot?

FIGURE 6.4 Completed Probable Passage

S3: Then, put him in Character. You know, like characters are people and he must be a person.

Group 4

S1: *Jagged ivory bones*. Oh, that is so sad.

S2: It's a problem. Put it there.

S1: No, it's what happens. You know like maybe somebody kills the little boy and then just leaves him, here, at the sea—oh put that in Setting—and then, like you know, years later, somebody finds his body and all that's left is his jagged ivory bones. So, it's the outcome.

S3: What's the birds for?

S2: Like maybe they ate part of him.

S1: Oh, that is so gross. No. Like maybe somebody was out hunting birds and shot him instead. And then he felt guilty. So, put that in Outcomes.

Group 5

S1: So, what's our gist statement?

S2: I don't know.

S3: Like, well, like okay, we said the boy and the birds were characters. Okay, so the boy goes to the sea and is going hunting but the birds startle him and so he shoots somebody else instead and tosses his jagged ivory bones into the sea and then he feels guilty because that was a sin.

Group 6

S1: Read our gist statement.

S2: Okay. We said this is the story of the Native American Indians Quicksilver and Frostflower who go to the sea and think about the sins of the white men who came and shot their tribe, even the little boys, and tossed their jagged ivory bones into the sea.

S3: That is so good.

Debriefing the Strategy

Probable Passage forces students to think about the characters, setting, conflict, resolution, and vocabulary of the story before they read the story.

Mr. Robin was using Probable Passage as a pre-reading activity, not only to introduce students to terms and phrases they would encounter while reading the selection but also to get them to predict and anticipate what might happen in the text. As students categorized the words, they discussed what

Probable Passage forces students to think about the characters, setting, conflict, resolution, and vocabulary of the story before they read the story.

To be able to hear what types of causal relationships or inferences students are making, be sure to spend time walking from group to group. Take notes on what you hear the students saying. Later, you can use those notes to show students what types of thinking skills they used while working.

the words meant as well as what the category headings meant. They saw causal relationships ("Yeah, but if he used the gun to kill something, then he probably felt guilty."), made comparisons ("I like what we said about the boy being the character better than him being the problem."), made inferences about unknown words ("Don't you think a frostflower has to be some sort of flower? I mean, it has the word *flower* in it."), and reached conclusions ("I think the boy did the shooting rather than someone else shooting him. I mean, that's got to be it because no other characters are mentioned, except for birds, and they can't shoot anything.").

As students assign words to individual boxes, they make the invisible act of thinking visible. This strategy shows us that we don't need to spend time giving worksheets that direct students to underline the cause and draw an arrow to the effect or circle the response that states the main idea. Instead, when we give students strategies like Probable Passage, we give them the opportunity to bring those thinking skills to the visible level.

Putting the Strategy to Work

1. *First, choose eight to fourteen key words.* After reading a story, think about words that would fit in the boxes. I like to choose some words that have an obvious connection and other words that might encourage some disagreement. I also try to find some words that I know will be unknown. However, it's critical that these be words for which the students can grasp the meaning by reading the selection.
2. *Then, model the strategy a few times.* Students need to hear how you think through this strategy before they can do it well. Tell them that you are going to place words into particular categories based on what you know about the categories and what the words mean to you. As you begin putting words into the boxes, be sure to think aloud your reasoning. Model creating a gist statement. If it's important to you that students use all the words (except for those in the Unknown Words box) when they write the statement, then model that. If they don't need to use all the words, then don't use them all. Finally, move to the final part of the worksheet—the To Discover section. Aloud, think through all the things you want to discover as you read the selection. Be as specific as possible. Don't say, "What happened?" but do say, "What is a plover?" or "Whose jagged ivory bones are they?" You will probably have to complete your list of questions on the back of the worksheet.

3. *After reading the story, return to the worksheet to see which of your To Discover questions you can answer.* Look to see if you now know the meaning of any words that are in the Unknown Words box. Then ask yourself, How would the author have arranged the words and how would that have changed the gist statement?
4. *After you've modeled this once with students, let them try it.* Once the groups have placed all their words in boxes and completed their gist statement, ask students where they placed the words. Record their answers on a blank transparency. I usually use two colors of markers to do this. One color of pen is used for the most common response and the other for the unusual response. That way, we have a quick visual cue about how the class responded. As students tell you what words they put into the Unknown Words box, don't spend time defining these words. The point is to make sure students see the word as one they don't know. Let students share their gist statements, and then, as a class, brainstorm what you want to discover when reading the selection. Finally, read the selection.

Questions and Answers

1. *Does everyone need to do a Probable Passage prior to reading a story?*
Good readers often know how to use their prior experiences to help them understand the flow of the story, and they know how to predict what might happen next; therefore, they might not need this structured strategy.
2. *Why should students compare their Probable Passages to the story after reading?*
Kids will make the comparison on their own. This comparison leads to interesting discussions. For instance, you can ask questions such as the following: Did your predictions make as much sense as what actually happened? How did your predictions differ from what happened in the story? Now that you've read the story, in what categories would the author place the key words? How did completing the Probable Passage help you better understand the story?
3. *Why is it important to ask students how the strategy helped them understand the story?*
Struggling readers often say that good readers read fast, read with expression, and know all the words. They don't see skilled readers

making predictions, modifying their predictions as they read, monitoring for understanding, making connections between the text and what they already know, or rereading when they've got a problem. And because dependent readers don't see good readers doing those things, they don't believe or understand that good readers actually do them. So, a strategy like Probable Passage makes the invisible visible for them. The more students practice making predictions, the better the chance that this will eventually become a natural part of their reading process.

4. *Will students become frustrated if their predictions don't match the text at all?*

If that happens, you might have put too much emphasis on "getting it right." Remind students throughout the process that what they are doing is considering some of the words or phrases they will soon be reading in the text to decide what they think about those terms. This isn't a guessing game; instead, this is a chance for students to see associations among and between words.

5. *Should students refer to their Probable Passages as they read?*

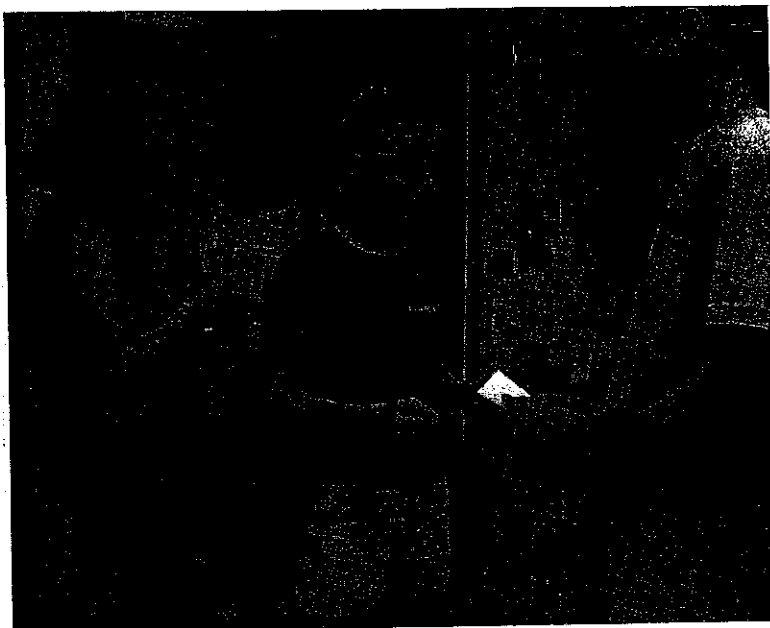
Absolutely. Often that's exactly what they want to do. And that's great. If you see students referring to their Probable Passage as they read, then you know they are thinking about *what* they are reading *while* they are reading. That sort of metacognitive reflection is the big goal—getting kids to think while they read! You especially want to redirect them to their To Discover questions.

6. *How is this like Word Splash?*

Word Splash, another pre-reading strategy, is very similar. You "splash" some words or phrases from a text on the board, transparency, or chart paper and have students write a prediction statement about what this text might be about based on these words. Again, use eight to fifteen words.

Tea Party

Like Probable Passage, Tea Party offers students a chance to consider parts of the text before they ever actually read it. It encourages active participation with the text and gives active adolescents a chance to get up and move around the classroom. This pre-reading strategy allows students to predict what they think will happen in the text as they make inferences, see causal



Students enjoy participating in Tea Party

relationships, compare and contrast, practice sequencing, and draw on their prior experiences. I first saw this strategy as I was working with teachers who were part of the South Coast Writing Project at the University of California Santa Barbara. It was developed by one of their very own teachers, Sue Perona. I've talked about this strategy all over the United States, mostly because it is one that students from all grade levels enjoy. Though I've made a few minor adjustments to Tea Party from what Sue first envisioned, the idea belongs to her.

Step Inside a Classroom

I was teaching an eighth-grade class. We were about to read a poem titled "Grandmother Grace" by Ronald Wallace. I distributed an index card to each of my thirty-three students. Each card had one phrase on it. I had chosen fifteen different phrases (see Figure 6.5), so nine were repeated two times and five repeated three times. After giving each student a card, I asked everyone to get up and move from student to student. They had four goals: (1) share their card with as many classmates as possible; (2) listen to others as they read their cards; (3) discuss how these cards might be related; and (4) speculate on what these cards, collectively, might be about.

Try this Tea Party strategy on your own. Check your prediction by reading the poem found in Appendix N, on page 367.

I didn't give her a good-bye kiss
I remember going there every summer—
I remember . . . afternoons of spit-moistened hankies . . .
Cast off, abandoned, in Williamsburg, Iowa . . .
God wouldn't let the good person sink.
She always sealed it with a kiss . . .
. . . how could I know she would sink?
I was ten.
The idea of a kiss at that time made my young stomach sink.
Let it be summer.
The violet kiss . . . sealed some agreement we had for the next summer . . .
I sat in that angular house with summer dragging me onward . . .
I went off in the bus for the last time . . .
Grace
I could have done without the words of Jesus

FIGURE 6.5 Lines and phrases from "Grandmother Grace" for Tea Party

ME: Does everybody have a card? All right, go ahead and begin. [As students begin reading their cards to one another, I circulate, listening.]

S1: Mine just says, "Grace."

S2: Okay, mine says, "I remember going there every summer."

S3: "God wouldn't let the good person sink."

S4: Huh?

S3: I know. "God wouldn't let the good person sink."

S4: So they must be on a boat?

S3: Maybe. What's yours say?

S4: "The kiss made my young stomach sink."

S5: Hey, mine says that, too.

S4: So, the kiss must be important.

S5: How come?

S4: Because we've both got it.

S6: Mine says, "I was ten."

S3: So somebody is ten and gets a kiss?

S6: Maybe when he was ten there was a girl and she wanted to kiss him but he didn't want to kiss her?

S3: Yeah, maybe.

I let students continue moving around the room, sharing cards, discussing ideas for a short amount of time—about ten to twelve minutes. I didn't want the conversation to drift to plans for Saturday night. I listened closely and sent them back to their chairs when they had either talked with everyone or the conversation began to lag.

ME: Now, get into groups of five or so and share your cards with everyone in the group. Discuss what you each heard and what the cards in front of you say; then write a "We think" statement that briefly describes what your group thinks this selection is about.

Students began to work in groups. Some occasionally got up and visited another group to refresh their memories about what was on other cards. Again, I circulated, listening to conversations.

One group:

S11: It's in Williamsburg. Did anyone else hear that card? "Cast off, abandoned, in Williamsburg, Iowa?"

S12: Yeah, and that "cast off," that made it sound like a boat, but I don't think there's an ocean in Iowa.

S13: Maybe a river?

S12: Yeah, maybe.

S14: So, somebody when he was ten went to Williamsburg?

S12: For like summer camp?

S13: Yeah, and he didn't want to go. I remember my brother when he went to camp. Oh my gosh, you'd have thought we were leaving him in a foreign country for a year. He certainly felt abandoned.

Another group:

S14: This one, this makes me think of my grandmother, see "spit-moistened hankies." That just sounds like a grandmother. And my grandmother, she's always trying to clean up my little sister's face by spitting on a napkin and cleaning her up. How gross.

S15: That is like so unhygienic. I mean spit. Gross.

S16: Yeah, but old people do it all the time. So maybe he's with his grandmother and she keeps trying to kiss him and clean him up and stuff?

S17: I think he's sad.

S15: Why?

S17: See here, see it says, "I didn't know this would be the last time." I think she died and now he misses her.

S18: So, like at first he didn't want to kiss her but then she died and now he feels really bad because he didn't kiss her. Yeah.

A third group:

S19: Don't you think they're on a ship?

S20: A ship?

S19: Or maybe a boat? You know it says about it sinking. And then there was something about her sinking and you call boats "her," you know, a girl's name.

S21: So maybe it is the Titanic. It sank.

S22: And that's why he didn't get to kiss her again because she drowned.

S23: But what's Iowa got to do with the Titanic? Wasn't that from England?

S21: Maybe he was from Iowa and he went to England and then was riding back on it or maybe like someone was coming over from England to go to Iowa?

S23: I don't know. How does this about "I could have done without the words of Jesus" fit with the Titanic? I don't think that's it.

Debriefing the Strategy

As these students studied the phrases on their cards, they began to identify possibilities for setting, characters, and problems in this text by connecting events to their prior experiences, sequencing events, considering causes of actions and the effects of those actions, and making inferences about characters and events. They were actively engaged with the meaning-making process long before they began reading the text. Eventually, they wrote brief statements that provided their predictions for this selection (see Figure 6.6).

Putting the Strategy to Work

1. *First, decide what phrases, sentences, or single words you want to place on index cards.* I try to select half as many phrases as I have students. Make sure you've chosen phrases that give insight into characters, setting, and conflicts. Choose some phrases that might be interpreted multiple ways.
2. *Don't paraphrase the text.* You can omit words if you need to shorten a phrase, but don't change the words.

Lauren, Erin, Chase, Eldam

We think this is about a boy who goes to a summer church camp and has a girlfriend and he likes her and all but he doesn't like to kiss. Once he goes home he wishes he had kissed her.

FIGURE 6.6 "We think" statement

3. As students move from student to student, make sure they not only share their cards but also begin discussing what the text might be about.
4. Next, have students return to small groups (five is a good number for this activity) to discuss what they presume is happening in the text.
5. Ask students to record their predictions by writing a "We think" statement—a paragraph that begins "We think that this selection is about. . ."
6. Finally, as students share their "We think" statements, make sure you ask them to explain how they reached that prediction. While you might easily see the inferences they've made, others might not understand what they were thinking.
7. Now, read the selection. If you've done this to introduce a novel, I'd choose words from the first chapter so that they can revisit their predictions sooner rather than later.

Questions and Answers

1. What if students don't get the "right" prediction?
This strategy, like Probable Passage, isn't about "right" and "wrong." It's about seeing relationships between words. This isn't a guessing game.

Instead, it's a time for students to combine their knowledge with the bits of information you've given them on the cards to practice making inferences, seeing causal relationships, sequencing, comparing and contrasting, drawing conclusions, and predicting.

2. *What do we do after we've read the selection?*

Once students have completed the selection, or the part of the selection that was used for the Tea Party, let them discuss how their predictions differed from the text. What they are doing is comparing how the author created relationships between words and how they created relationships between those same words. Sometimes, we look again at the phrases I put onto cards (show them the entire list on a transparency), and we talk about which phrases led them astray or kept them on target. You can also have students skim the selection, looking for other key words or phrases, ones that, had they been included, might have triggered predictions either closer to or further from the actual text.

3. *Can you do this with expository texts?*

Yes, though it takes more work. We did this in a class that was studying the Revolutionary War. Students shared their sentences and then, instead of writing a prediction statement, tried to group their cards by category: causes of the war, effects of the war, problems each side faced, and so on. Students placed their cards directly onto chart paper with tape and then, as they read the chapter, rearranged the cards as needed.

4. *What if some of my students are such disabled readers that they can't read the words on the cards?*

This came up when I decided to use Tea Party with a portion of Thoreau's *Walden*. I was working with some high school students who read at about a third-grade level. This was a required text, so I didn't have a choice about whether or not to have students read it. I decided the best way to get them thinking about this difficult text was to start by working with small parts of it. Though I chose the sentences carefully, some cards still had very difficult vocabulary or confusing syntax. Consequently, when I prepared the cards, I color coded them so that all the red cards said the same, all the blue cards said the same, and so on. I told students to find other students with the same color card. Then, as I walked around helping with decoding and vocabulary, the groups practiced reading their sentences aloud to each other and discussed what their one sentence might mean. They wrote their comments about their sentence on the back of their cards. Some students rewrote

their sentences into their own words. Once students had rehearsed saying what was written on their cards and had discussed what their sentences might mean, they began the Tea Party.

5. *So, why's it called Tea Party?*

Think about what you do at a party. You walk around, visit with one person, then move on to the next. You pick up a bit of the conversation here, a bit more there. You share what you have to say and listen attentively (I hope) to the person you're visiting with at that moment. Tea Party simulates that talking-listening pattern. By calling it a Tea Party, you're making that association for students; setting the mood with some cookies for the students to munch can't hurt either!

Reflections

The more we frontload students' knowledge of a text and help them become actively involved in constructing meaning prior to reading, the more engaged they are likely to be as they read the text. Dependent readers must be reminded often that comprehension begins prior to reading and extends into the discussions they have after they've finished reading. Many dependent readers think of comprehension only as answering questions correctly after reading the text. That's too late. Pre-reading strategies that focus on active engagement with the text help struggling readers do what good readers do—think all throughout the reading process, not just at the conclusion.

The more we frontload students' knowledge of a text and help them become actively involved in constructing meaning prior to reading, the more engaged they are likely to be as they read the text.

Dear George,

I was always so impressed at how well you listened to what I said about stories before we read them. Then, I heard you tell someone in the hall, "Yeah, if you listen to her before we read the story, then it's okay if you don't read it or don't get it. She's already told you all the important parts." So, while I was busy providing meaning for you, you were busy figuring out what you needed to remember so that you didn't actually have to comprehend anything on your own. We were quite a team, George. Quite a team.